A note concerning Phoenician *spt*

Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo

In the inscription of the Punic ram n. 13 from the Egades islands[1] the first word—to be read as *spt*—has been discussed in the first editions[2] without founding for it a likely meaning. The same word was also identified by Ph. C. Schmitz and me on ram n. 3, in a difficult context.[3] A possible parallel is the noun *spt* attested in the votive inscription RÉS 930 from Sidon, referring to the function of the donor.[4] It was thanks to Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti that an explanation for this Phoenician word has been provided and it is to him that I am honoured to dedicate this note.[5]

Since the publication of ram 13 it was supposed that the noun *spt* had some relation with the object where it had been engraved. It was not the name of the ram itself, which in the inscription is called *mgḥ*, whose meaning probably corresponds to Greek ἔμβολον; as for *spt,* I supposed (Amadasi 2022) that it could designate or be related to the firing place where the ram had been melted, in particular because it was cited in the expression *spt 'sklt,* this last word being perhaps the feminine ethnicon "Sicilian," preceded by the article (*h- > '*—as frequently in Punic). No persuading explanation came, however, from the damaged text of ram 3 and from a possible parallel with RÉS 930.

Fabrizio Pennacchietti, however, having read Amadasi 2022, immediately proposed that *spt* had to be explained as the Phoenician name indicating a "ship/boat," corresponding to Arabic *safīna*, deriving from Aramaic. Epigraphically, the word is attested in imperial Aramaic as *spynh* (pl. *spynt'*)[6] and is used in Biblical Hebrew as *sefīnā* (Jonas, 1,5), referring to a boat travelling from Jaffa to Tarshish, and called with the usual word *'anīyā* in the previous lines (1-4). The Phoenician noun shows the assimilation of *nun* to the following *taw* of the feminine gender, regular in this language, the classic example being *šat < šant* (pl. *šanūt*) "year" (assimilation apparently not present in *mspnt* "ceiling." KAI

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[1] Regarding the important findings in this zone related to the first Punic war, cf. Royal and Tusa (2020).

[2] De Simone (2018: 161), reading *skt* or *spt* without proposals of explanation; Amadasi Guzzo (2022: 17-18), reading *spt*, trying to explain it in relation to *sp* "basin."

[3] Editio princeps Garbini (2014); cf. also Garbini (2015 and 2020), who reads these three letters as *YWT*. Cf. for *spt* Schmitz (2020), translating it as "storm," and Amadasi Guzzo (in print), who already reported Pennacchietti's suggestion.

[4] Apicella and Briquel Chatonnet (2008), with complete bibliography.

[5] Here the context and meaning of Phoenician *spt* are treated only; aspects regarding the word in the context of the Semitic languages and its possible attribution to a particular type of ship are not dealt with. Some details in Amadasi Guzzo (in print).

[6] Hoftijzer and Jongeling (1995: 797, s.v. spynh), referring also to Accadian *sapīnatu*.

10,6, from Byblos—perhaps from the root *spn* as *spt*—possibly to be analysed, however, as plural, instead of the generally proposed singular).

The noun *spt* present on the rams' inscriptions, applied in these cases to warships, is persuasively explained as "ship/boat."[7] Instead, in the inscription RÉS 930, from Sidon, *spt* is not equally clear. The text, traditionally dated to the 2nd century BCE, but now placed around 300 BCE or slightly later (letters' shape), is clear (s. fn. 4):

HMNḤT Z 'Š YTN 'BDMSKR RB 'BR LSPT
RB ŠNY BN B'LṢLḤ L'DNY LŠLMN YBRK

"This is the offering that Abdmiskar, *rb 'br lspt,*
rb šny, son of Baalṣaloḥ gave to his Lord to Shalman; may he bless him."

Among the interpretations advanced, Apicella and Briquel-Chatonnet proposed to identify *spt* with the noun meaning "rivage" and to translate the function of Abdmiskar as "chef de l'au-delà du rivage, chef en second," confronting *spt* with *śph* "bord, lèvre," written in Hebrew with *śin* developed in *samekh* in Phoenician (cf., differently, *ʿsr* < *ʿśr* "ten," in some Phoenician attestations). Abdmiskar, according to this interpratation, that fits, although not completely, with the one proposed here, was a naval high officer in the Aegean.[8]

Accepting the meaning "ship/boat" for *spt,* Abdmiskar's function can be understood as "the commander of the other side of the boat, second-in command."[9] This expression, however, needs some explanation concerning the composition of the naval crews, and particularly the specific functions of the officials in a Phoenician ship. Our data, however, are not direct and derive mainly from classical authors, often in the context of chronicles of specific events. From these sources, of different ages, it has been reconstructed, regarding especially the Carthaginian fleet,[10] that in a boat there were officers of different levels; but from these sources it is not possible, particularly in the present context, to specify Abdmiskar's charge. According to Apicella and Briquel-Chatonnet translation of *rb 'br lspt,*

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[7] For the kind of boat that could be referred to by the word *spynh* cf. Amadasi Guzzo (in print).

[8] Apicella and Briquel-Chatonnet (2008 : 182): "La titre d'Abdmiskar correspondrait ainsi à un commandement en Égée, aux côtés de son roi" (Philokles, known as a king of Sidon).

[9] For the meaning of *rb* connected to military charges in Carthage s. Sznycer (1990).

[10] Particularly Medas (1999); I thank Piero Bartoloni to whom I owe the first data concerning the Phoenician equipages. I am particularly grateful to Stefano Medas and to Piero Gianfrotta for their help in this field.

where *'br lspt* is a geographical expression, he was a high naval official, acting as substitute of Philokles, king of Sidon between 286-279 BCE.[11] Differently, understanding *spt* as "ship/boat," I suppose that Abdmiskar was the second commander of a ship[12] of a kind impossible to ascertain at present. If the expression *rb 'br lspt* is rightly interpreted as "chief/commander of the other side of the boat,"[13] the notice reported by Aelianus, *Hist. Var.* IX,40 that the Carthaginian ships had two helms and two helmsmen, could help to understand the concrete meaning of this function (two commanders in relation to each side of the ship, one being perhaps the commander of the whole boat). However, Aelianus description is not generally accepted,[14] even though ships with a double stern and/or a double prow, and in some cases also with a double crew, are attested by some ancient sources, however in different milieus.[15] In any case, Abdimaskar was a naval officer of high rank—we do not know in which field of activity—a rank that is shown also by his votive gift, a marble obelisk high 1,05 m. (reflecting his activity? S. fn. 15), a gift that only a rich member of the society could offer. Perhaps more deep research in the sources will allow to clarify questions concerning the organisation of the command in the Phoenician fleets—in different times, kind of ships, and circumstances—and to understand more clearly the concrete reality under the expression examined here. At present, we owe to Fabrizio Pennacchietti to have added a new word to the Phoenician vocabulary, yet so incompletely known.

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[11] Apicella and Briquel-Chatonnet (2008: 181-182).

[12] Medas (1999); s. also Bartoloni (1988: 137): "… le navi erano dirette da almeno tre ufficiali, dei quali uno, con funzione superiore, aveva il comando del mezzo, l'altro rivestiva l'incarico di proreuta o ufficiale in seconda, mentre il terzo era il pilota…".

[13] A broken inscription from the Eshmun sanctuary in Bostan esh-Sheikh near Sidon is an offering containing in a broken context the expression *rb 'b*[…, in relation with the word read as *'ny* and interpreted as "boat", attested for the first time in Phoenician; cf. Mathys and Stucky (2018: 366-369).

[14] Medas (1999: 97, fn. 38).

[15] Cf. Felici (2016: 188), treating the naval transport of stones, often from Egypt (particularly hobeliscs; it is perhaps a mere coincidence that the vow of Abdmiskar is in the shape of an obelisk; cf. for the monument Gubel *et al.* (2002: 86-87) by P. Bordreuil and E. Gubel).

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Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo

University of Rome "La Sapienza"

mariagiulia.amadasi@libero.it